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NORTH EAST WOODS GRANTED NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Woodlands in and around Aberdeenshire are getting a £57,924 funding boost from Forestry Commission Scotland as part of a drive to breathe new life into neglected woods close to populated areas and enhance the quality of life for those living nearby.

The cash boost is set to help two urban forestry projects in the North East. The projects - Arnhall Moss and Portlethen Moss and Aberdeen City Woodlands - will ensure that the woodland areas are revitalised through a variety of methods including: improving signage, creating new path links between green spaces, planting new trees, removing litter and waste, and creating recreation areas.

The funding comes from the 'Woods In and Around Towns' (WIAT) initiative which is designed to improve woodland environments, and increase access and recreational opportunities for people living in built up areas. WIAT funding is administered by Forestry Commission Scotland.

Announcing the woodland cash boost, Scottish Forestry Minister, Sarah Boyack said;

"There is growing awareness that woods in highly populated areas provide more than just recreation opportunities - they contribute to people's well-being, stimulate new economic activity and investment, generate education opportunities, help benefit the environment, and unite communities.

"This funding will provide the catalyst for many organisations to breathe new life into neglected woods throughout the country and encourage people to get out and about to enjoy the woods on their doorstep. A walk, run, ride or cycle in a local wood is often the perfect way to relax and escape the hectic rush of everyday life and can also make a significant contribution to people's health.

"By revitalising urban woodlands, improving access and increasing recreational opportunities within them, previously 'unwelcoming' woodlands can become a central part of daily community life."

The following woodland projects are receiving grants.

Aberdeen City Woodlands - Eleven Aberdeen City Council woodland areas will benefit from a grant of £25,076. The funding will be used to improve access and links to the city's green spaces, improving the biodiversity of woodland areas. Enhanced access and recreation provisions will provide local communities additional incentives to make more use of the woodlands on their doorsteps. In addition, strategic management plans will be developed for each wood to ensure delivery of long-term, well managed, biodiversity, recreation and educational opportunities.

(The eleven woods are: Auchmill Community Woodland; Woodside and Persley; Seaton Park; Hazlehead Woods; North Loirston; Burnsbanks; Wellington Road Shelter Belt; Kincorth Hill; Hilton Woods; Springhill; and Sheddocksley)

Aberdeen City Council, countryside officer, Ian Talboys said;

"This funding will mean that we can start investing more time and money into our woodlands to make them more accessible to their local communities and encourage local people to get involved with their local woods. This is the start of an exciting programme of projects for the benefit of the people and wildlife using the woods."

Arnhall Moss (by Westhill) and Portlethen Moss - Plans for these two woodland areas, owned by Aberdeenshire Council, include restoration of natural moss areas, footpath upgrading and creation, removal of litter, vegetation management, new tree planting and introduction of new signage to enhance recreation opportunities. A grant of £32,848 has been awarded to the project. Great emphasis is being placed on increasing community involvement in the active management of the woods and will be a key element of the Council's identified improvement work.

Elrick councillor, Mark Cullen, whose ward includes Arnhall Moss, said the Commission's cash would be put to good use.

"The Moss is very well used by lots of people, including dog walkers and those who just want a bit of peace and quiet," he said

"The Moss is about five thousand years old and is a little treasure within the centre of Westhill. It's a

phenomenal sum, but I welcome any money that's spent to improve the quality of life for local people. I welcome any moves that are made to improve the facilities on offer."

Councillor Paul Melling whose Portlethen South ward encompasses Portlethen Moss, said the announcement follows years of local effort to improve the site. He hopes local schools will soon be able to make good use of the Moss for educational purposes. He said;

"Those involved in the local community will be very happy to see the money coming in. It really gives the community efforts a big boost."

"It is an issue which is very much in the forefront of the community here - there are all sorts of vegetation and plants that are quite unique to this area. This will be a real boost for the area and for those who have put so much effort into securing the Moss's future."

Leader of Aberdeenshire Council, Audrey Findlay, whose Westhill Central ward borders Arnhall Moss, also welcomed the funding. She added;

"This is a welcome boost in funds to further improve recreational opportunities for the people of Aberdeenshire. Arnhall Moss is a well-used local resource and the community and the council have already taken steps to enhance the area. This money means we can move forward more quickly and give the Moss a new lease of life.

"Portlethen Moss will now be more accessible for the surrounding expanding community and should become an even more valuable recreational resource."

There have been five WIAT funding rounds to date with a total in excess of £9.2 million being committed to over a hundred projects, involving over 8,000 hectares of urban woodland across Scotland - an area the size of Edinburgh.

Notes to Editors:

- 1) The funding to revitalise woodlands across Scotland is primarily from the WIAT (Woods In and Around Towns) Challenge Fund, to which applicants submitted bids to Forestry Commission Scotland. Challenge fund grants are paid as top-up to standard grants from Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme.
- 2) All the bids to the WIAT grant scheme had to include community consultation, improved access, landscape enhancement and work to boost wildlife habitats. Settlements with a population greater than 2,000 were invited to apply for the grants.
- 3) WIAT funding is no longer available following the closure of the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme on 31 August 2006 in preparation for the launch of the new Land Management Contracts in 2007.
- 4) Forestry Commission Scotland serves as the Scottish Executive's forestry department. It manages 668,000 hectares of national forest land for multiple benefits, including nature conservation, public recreation, timber production, and rural and community development; supports other woodland owners with grants, felling licences, advice and regulation; promotes the benefits of forests and forestry; and advises Ministers on forestry policy. For further information, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland

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